

ALFRED HITCHCOCK'S mystery magazine

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THE GREEN



WE HAD been married three months and I rather thought it was time to get rid of my wife.

I searched the greenhouse and its shed, but they contained only such non-toxic items as grafting wax, powdered limestone, Sphagnum moss, and the like.

I returned to the house. "Henrietta, where do you keep the poisons? I mean the sprays and things like that for the garden?"

"But, dear," my wife said. "We use the organic method. No sprays or chemicals of any kind. We enrich the soil nature's way with organic materials—leaves, grass clippings, and especially spoiled hay. A healthy soil produces healthy plants and insects simply do not destroy healthy plants. What did you want the poison for, dear?"

"I saw a beetle on one of the shrubs."

She smiled mildly. "One mustn't kill beetles indiscriminately, William. So many of them are beneficial."

I studied her. "Henrietta, I've been meaning to ask you, just where do you buy those dresses you wear?" I had also meant to ask, "And why?" but I did not.

She glanced briefly at a mirror. "Every month or so I just phone Elaine's shop and have her send over three or four dresses."

"Don't you ever try them on before you buy them?"

"There's no need to, dear. Elaine knows my size." She looked down at her dress. "Do you like it, William?"

"It fits perfectly. However, the

Bachelors are too smart to marry, we have been told, but William was smarter than most. He married for a vast amount of money to which he planned to fall heir. The unusual manner in which he collected however, came as a complete shock to him, as the sudden turn of events herein show.

next time you feel the inclination to buy another dress, I think that we'd both better go to Elaine's and look over her stock first."

When my father departed this world, he left me an inheritance which was just short of adequate. By that I mean that it was necessary for me to dip into my capital in order to exist in a civilized manner. During the course of fifteen years that capital, of course, diminished to non-existence. In short, at the time I met Henrietta, I lived on credit.

I have never felt that work is a duty, a pleasure, or a challenge, and I have always suspected that those who enjoy it are basically masochistic.

I had existed forty-five years without the necessity of stooping to labor, and I felt that it was manifestly unfair to expect me to do so now.

There remained one last recourse. Marriage.

I have never been against that institution for others. I realize that the average mind must occupy itself with something, whether it be

labor, comic books, or marriage. However, I have always cherished my position of independence and the prospect of becoming a member of a "team"—even if that team consisted of only two people—was acutely depressing.



Yet I was penniless, and it was necessary for me to dip into marriage.

Once having arrived at that decision, I now attended the functions of my set with an appraising eye. Desperate though I was, I found myself rejecting one prospect after another. Eventually I extended my search to afternoon teas—and at one of them I first glimpsed Henrietta.

I was not impressed. Her clothes were not exactly out of fashion, but one had the impression that she had purchased them blindfolded. She was a small, fragile-appearing woman who sat alone in a corner, smiling faintly to herself, and one had the feeling that she had wandered in accidentally and now was not quite certain of how to get out.

I had been stifling a yawn, when Henrietta spilled her cup of tea.

The hostess' eyes darted like arrows. "Really, Henrietta!"

She blushed scarlet. "I'm sorry, Clara. I was thinking of something else."

Clara's shoulders twitched. "Why can't you be more careful? I've just had the rug cleaned."

It occurred to me that a woman who dressed as Henrietta did, did so because she was either poor, or too rich to care. When the chattering resumed, I turned to Hawley

Purvis who was sitting at my right. "Henrietta? Would she be one of the Bartons? The ones who lost practically all their money last year?"

"Good heavens, no!" Purvis said. "She's a Lowell. Has that fabulous place on the Lakeview Road. Fifty acres or something like that and scores of servants."

"Married?"

"No. Never has been."

I stared across the room at Henrietta. A maid approached her with the teapot. Henrietta seemed alarmed at the prospect of again holding a full cup of tea. She was about to refuse, but she was too late. The maid poured.

Henrietta held the cup gingerly between the fingers of both hands.

I rubbed my jaw speculatively. Fifty acres? Scores of servants? I watched Henrietta covertly. She consumed half the cup of tea, and after five minutes her mind evidently wandered again. The cup slipped from her fingers and the contents spilled over the rug.

Clara's face turned livid and she shrieked. "Henrietta!"

This time Henrietta paled. If she could have fainted, I am positive she would have.

I rose and elaborately poured the contents of my own cup onto Clara's rug. "Madam," I said stiffly. "Take your damn rug to the

cleaners and charge the bill to me." It was the moment for action.

I offered my arm to Henrietta and we left.

The greatest obstacle to my marriage plans did not come from Henrietta, but from her attorney, Adam McPherson.

I made his acquaintance one week after Henrietta and I announced our engagement. He came to my apartment, introduced himself, and then stared at me stonily. "How much do you want?"

"For what?"

"How much do you want to call off your marriage to Henrietta?"

I frowned. "Did she send you?"

"No. This is my own idea. I'm offering you ten thousand."

"If you will turn, you will find a door behind you. It is the way out."

He was not intimidated. "When I heard about you, I had you investigated. You are penniless and in debt to any number of establishments, including Curley's Rug Cleaning Service." His lips tightened. "You are marrying Henrietta for her money."

"Really? And what, besides the state of my finances, makes you so positive about that?"

"I have had your acquaintances polled. They unanimously agree that you are as capable of a tender

emotion as a fish. A cold fish, they all specified." He reiterated his offer. "Ten thousand dollars."

What was a paltry ten thousand compared to Henrietta's millions? "Henrietta and I are deeply in love," I said firmly. "I would not part with her for less than . . . for *all* the money in the world."

"Twenty thousand."

"Never."

"Thirty. And that's absolutely final."

"So is my 'No'. Is this *your* money you are offering?"

"Yes."

"And what is your motive?"

"I do not want Henrietta to make a mistake she will regret all her life."

I ventured a guess. "Have you ever asked her to marry you?"

He nodded glumly. "About four times a year for the last twelve years."

"And her sentiments?"

"She regards me as a dear trustworthy friend. Very depressing." A thought suddenly brightened his face. "Do you *really* love Henrietta?"

I used a word strange to me. "Passionately."

He rubbed his hands. "Then of course you would have no objection to signing a document disclaiming all rights to Henrietta's money?"

"Henrietta would never consent to anything like that."

"I'll ask her."

"I'll wring your neck." I regained control of myself. "If it is your interest to see that Henrietta is happy, undoubtedly you have noticed that she has achieved a certain euphoria since I met her."

He admitted it reluctantly. Then he sighed. "All right. I will not oppose the marriage further."

"How good of you."

He studied me a moment. "Henrietta really needs to be protected."

I agreed. "She is rather simple."

He corrected me. "Ingenuous." He went to the door and then turned. "I suppose you know that she teaches at the university?"

I blinked. "Henrietta?"

"Yes. Associate Professor. Botany. Donates her entire salary to charity."

So that was why she had never been home on weekdays, except for the evenings. "She never told me."

"Probably forgot," McPherson said. "She's absentminded about some things."

Henrietta and I were married three weeks later. It was a small private ceremony marred only by the fact that McPherson arrived drunk and burst into tears as I slipped the ring on Henrietta's

finger. She was excited and cried.

We spent our honeymoon in the Bahamas, where Henrietta collected an incredible number of ferns and various tropical vegetations for further study at home.

When we returned to her estate, I endured a week of bad service and poor food while I occupied my time by checking the household accounts.

The day Henrietta returned to teaching at the university, I called the servants together. They regarded me with uniformly narrow eyes and a collective insolence.

I attacked the keystone first—the housekeeper. "Mrs. Tragger. Front and center."

She folded her arms. "What is it?"

I smiled with infinite sweetness. "There is something about you which puzzles me. Why do you go about with that perpetual frown upon your face?"

She frowned.

I spoke gently. "I should think that you would be bubblingly happy. Gay. Absolutely hilarious. Whistling day and night. After all you have successfully managed to pad the household accounts to the sum of eighteen thousand dollars in the last six years."

Her face darkened. "Are you accusing me of . . ."

"Yes."

She glared. "I'll sue immediately."

"Please do. As soon as you are released from prison."

Uncertainty flickered in her eyes, but she said, "You can't prove a thing."

It would have been difficult. However I showed my teeth. "Madam, I *can* prove it for the satisfaction of any judge or jury. Yet I am inclined to be generous. Do you have a suitcase?"

She blinked. "Yes."

"Splendid. Then pack it at once and leave. You are fired."

She seemed about to utter something profane and devastating, but perhaps the nature of my smile changed her mind. She licked her lips and glanced at her audience. Finally she harumphed and stalked out of the room.

I turned next to the chauffeur, an unshaven creature who evidently slept in his uniform. "Simpson."

"Yeah?"

"Do you think that we ought to junk our cars?"

"Huh?"

"I really believe that in the interests of economy we ought to get rid of them—one and all. According to our records of gas consumption and mileage, I find that not one of them gives us more than one mile per gallon."

He shifted his feet. "Them fig-

ures are probably wrong somewhere."

"Possibly. But you need worry about them no longer. I presume that you too have a suitcase?"

He glowered. "Only Miss Lowell can fire me."

I smiled. "Miss Lowell is now Mrs. Graham, and if I find you on the grounds one hour from now, I shall regard you as a trespasser. I will not shoot you in the head. That is impenetrable. However, enough of you remains so that I cannot possibly miss."

I did not dismiss all of the servants—only seventy percent of them—and I had half of those replaced immediately by a reputable employment agency.

That evening dinner was on time, served flawlessly, and satisfying to the palate.

Henrietta did not notice the food—she seldom does—but toward the end of the meal she happened to glance at the serving maid and frowned thoughtfully. "Are you new here? I haven't seen you before."

"Yes, madam."

Henrietta turned to me. "What happened to Tessie?"

"I dismissed her. Also quite a few of the others. I replaced some, but only those necessary to the proper functioning of this house. Was it essential for you to have

three personal inadequate maids?"

"Three? I'm sorry, William. I didn't know I had *any*. Mrs. Tragger does all the hiring. And besides I've never seen any of them. I dress myself." She looked at me hopefully. "Did you fire Mrs. Tragger?"

"Yes."

"And the chauffeur?"

"Yes."

Her gaze was one of profound admiration. "I was always a little . . . *afraid* . . . of them. Especially the chauffeur. He always seemed so put out when I asked him to drive me anywhere. So I always took a bus."

After a month I had the immediate estate functioning with reasonable efficiency and honesty on the part of the servants.

And now, at breakfast, I pondered my next step—independence, with wealth. And that called for the quite permanent disposal of my wife.

Poison? Yes, an agreeable method, but could I purchase any without having to sign some sort of a register?

I had never killed anyone, yet I had the feeling that I could murder with a certain equanimity. Not that I would linger for the death agonies, of course. I would tactfully leave the room.

"Dear," Henrietta said. "Have

you ever thought of teaching?"

"Teaching?"

"Yes, dear. There's an instructorship in history going to be open this fall and there seems to be no prospect of filling it. So many teachers have majored in the sciences lately. They consider it more patriotic, I suppose."

Rat poison? Somehow the idea seemed too plebeian.

"All you would need is a B.A.," Henrietta said. "And you have that. And I think it would be so nice if you and I left together for the university each morning."

"I haven't the slightest inclination to teach. I much prefer to spend my time learning."

"But just learning is selfish."

"Me? *Selfish*?"

"I don't mean you specifically, dear," she said hastily. "I just meant that learning is *taking* and teaching is *giving*. And if you taught, you would feel useful."

"I dislike feeling useful. It is much too common." I suddenly remembered Ralph Winkler. Possibly he would have poison lying about his premises. He and I had been roommates in college and he had majored in chemistry, or some such trade.

After breakfast I looked up Ralph's address in the phone book and arrived there forty-five minutes later. It was a painfully neat

house set behind twenty-five feet of precise lawn.

Ralph poured coffee and settled back in his chair. "I haven't seen you at any of the alumni meetings."

"Ralph," I said. "I wonder if you might be able to lend me a little."

His eyes clouded reminiscently. "Remember good old Gillie Stearns?"

"No. It doesn't necessarily have to be arsen. . . ."

"He could wiggle his ears," Ralph said. "Became an anthropologist."

I glanced out of the window at what appeared to be apple trees.

"He's the one who wrote that term paper on the appendix," Ralph said.

"Who did?"

"Stearns. Nobody knows what the function of the appendix really is, but it was Stearns' theory that the way to have a healthy appendix was to wiggle. . . ."

"I see you're quite a gardener," I said.

"Orchardist. I have five apple trees, two peach, and one pecan." He frowned slightly. "The pecan doesn't seem to produce."

"Aren't you supposed to have two pecan trees?"

"I never thought of that."

"Ralph," I said. "Do you spray?"

I mean your fruit trees? Often?"

I had touched his subject. He rose enthusiastically. "William, follow me."

I took my cup along.

He led me through the house, into the back yard, and to the garage. He selected a key from an impressive ring and unlocked the door. "I keep the car parked on the street. Not enough room in here." He opened the door and stepped aside. "See for yourself, William."

I received the immediate impression that I had entered a combination garden shop and pharmacy. A riding mower, a tractor, and various accessory attachments occupied the floor space. The shelves lining one entire side were filled with bottles, jars, cans, and cartons. An assortment of manual spray guns hung on the walls. "How big is your place, Ralph?"

"A full quarter of an acre."

My eyes ran over the shelves and I made a random choice. "What's in that little red can in the corner?"

"Just about the strongest stuff I have," he said proudly. "It'll kill anything." He pointed to a gas mask and a rubber suit hanging on a peg. "I have to wear that when I spray. Can't leave an inch of skin exposed."

I stared at the can. "And you

spray this poison on your apples?"

"You've never seen better ones in your life, William. Not a sign of sooty blotch, calyx end rot, or Brooks fruit spot."

"And you eat these apples?"

"Perfectly safe. The spray eventually washes off through wind and weather. Besides, I always peel the ones I eat."

I finished my coffee and handed him the cup. "Would I be imposing if I asked for a re-fill? I'll wait here and browse."

While he was gone, I pried open the red can with a screwdriver. The contents were a sickly yellow dust. I filled an envelope, gingerly licked the flap to seal it, and put it back into my pocket.

Ralph returned with my cup. "Remember good old Jimmy Haskins?"

"No." I took the cup. "What do you think about the organic method of raising apples?"

A chill descended. "Most unscientific."

"We have about forty apple trees on our place," I said. "We never spray."

His lips tightened. "There are all kinds of people in this world."

I had the impression that he regretted bringing me the coffee. There was no point in departing on such a frigid note. I searched my memory and then chuckled.

"Remember good old Clarence? The one we all said could get his haircut in a pencil sharpener?"

"Yes," Ralph said coldly. "He's my brother."

I did not, of course, intend to poison Henrietta in our own home. That would lead to the inevitable autopsy and the equally inevitable electric chair.

But an earlier conversation with Henrietta had given me a splendid idea.

"Dear," she had said. "Every summer I go on a field trip for a week or two. Would it be all right if I went this year?"

I had been about to tell her that I had no objections—providing that she did not expect me to go with her—but then a thought had occurred to me. "Where will you be going?"

"It would be a canoe trip, William," she had said. "The Minnesota woods."

"You've been taking trips like this alone?"

"Oh, no. I usually go with some of my students. But this year I was hoping that . . . that just you and I could go. We could hire a guide if you think we'd need one, but actually I don't think that would be necessary if we didn't wander from our camp."

The idea of battling mosquitoes was not inviting, but I smiled. "Of course I will go with you. And we will not require a guide."

My problem had been solved. We would be alone in the middle of nowhere. I would simply kill her and bury her.

Then I would inform the authorities that my wife had wandered away from our camp and been lost. There would be a search, of course, but Henrietta would not be found.

And the actual method of the murder itself? I had dallied with shooting, stabbing, strangling, and bludgeoning. I eventually rejected them all. They required a primitive violence which is foreign to my nature. This morning I finally decided that poisoning was the civilized procedure.

When I returned from Ralph Winkler's home, I put the poison under lock and key.

In the evening, as usual, Henrietta brought her notes and reference books into the livingroom and worked on her latest paper for the Botany Journal. I put a stack of records into the phonograph and settled under a lamp for another review of Henrietta's accounts.

After a while I turned in my chair. "Henrietta, there's one item which keeps recurring. Every month you withdraw two thou-

sand dollars from one of your bank accounts. The money seems to disappear. At least I can't find any accounting for it."

Henrietta hesitated. "I'm afraid it's blackmail, dear."

"Blackmail?" Perhaps I had underestimated her. "What in the world have you done to be blackmailed for?"

"Nothing, dear. It's because of Professor Henrich. You see, he and his wife adopted a child. Only it wasn't through a regular agency. Black market, they call it. And they thought that everything was fine. But a year later a man came to them and claimed that he was the child's father. He seemed to have evidence to prove it and he wanted the baby back unless. . . ."

It was obvious. "Unless Professor Henrich paid?"

"Yes. First it was one hundred dollars a month and then gradually he was paying five hundred. But the professor and his wife simply couldn't afford that for long. They had to dip into their savings and when those were gone Professor Henrich came to me to borrow money. He more or less broke down and told me the entire story. And so I took over the payments."

"You took over the payments? How could Henrich possibly *allow* you to do something like that?"

"But he doesn't really know what I'm doing, dear. I just told him that I'd talk to Smith—that's the name of the blackmailer. And later I told the professor that I'd managed to frighten Smith away by threatening to go to the police."

"But obviously you didn't."

"No. I thought it over and realized that there wasn't any actual *proof* that Smith was a blackmailer. He always insisted on cash from the professor. And so if I failed to *prove* to the police that Smith was a blackmailer, he might become very angry with my interference and actually take the child back. I was in a dilemma and money seemed to be the only way out."

"Five hundred dollars at first? And then more and more? Until today it is two thousand dollars a month?"

"Yes, dear."

I rubbed my forehead and eyes. "Don't you realize that eventually it will be three thousand? Four?"

She shook her head. "No. Two thousand is my absolute limit. I told him so when he asked for two thousand five hundred. He seemed disappointed, but he accepted the situation." She smiled. "I can be very firm when I want to."

I had difficulty speaking. "Just how much have you given this contemptible wretch?"

"I'm not positive. About fifty thousand dollars by now, I imagine."

"*Fifty-thousand dollars of my . . . of our money?* To a man who neither sows nor reaps?"

She nodded. "That reminds me, William. You'd have only three classes a day. That's because instructorships are usually given to students who are also working for advanced degrees and the university doesn't want to overload them. Would you like to work for your M.A. too?"

"When are you going to see Smith again?"

"He comes here the first Monday of each month. He's very prompt and he always phones me on the Sunday before to remind me to get to the bank for the cash Monday morning."

I went to the liquor cabinet and made myself a stiff drink. "When he phones next, let me talk to him."

The call came Sunday afternoon and Henrietta handed the phone to me.

"Would you please leave the room, Henrietta," I said. "I am always a bit embarrassed when I reason with people."

When she was gone I spoke into the mouthpiece. "You've received your last cent, you miserable parasite."

"Who the hell are you?"

I explained precisely and then added. "I control every penny which leaves this house and you are no longer included in our charities."

"In that case I'll take the kid away from the professor."

"I doubt very much if you can. Your references aren't exactly the best—as Professor Henrich and his wife, and I and mine will gladly testify in any court."

"Look, mister, I can still make a lot of trouble. A lot of trouble."

"You are welcome to try." But then something occurred to me. A man deprived of a two thousand dollar a month income has a tendency to turn ugly. Undoubtedly he would keep an eye on us. And when Henrietta disappeared would he put two and two together? Blackmailers are notoriously suspicious. Would he approach me and demand money for silence? And if I did not pay, would he see to it that I was caused considerable embarrassment with the police? Would he cause the authorities to resume the search for Henrietta a bit more diligently—with an eye directed toward the sub-surface of our last encampment?

There is only one way to deal with a blackmailer—be he real or potential.

"Just one moment," I said. "Do you have proof that you are the

father of the child? Real proof?"

"The professor saw the papers."

"But I haven't. I doubt if you have any proof at all. But if you do, bring it here Monday evening. No proof, no money." I hung up.

I explained to Henrietta that I wanted to see Smith alone when he came—to further reason with him—and on Monday evening she returned happily to the university to attend a lecture on the shallow root systems of the Sequoias.

When she was gone, I saw to it that the servants retired to their quarters and then went to the liquor cabinet in the study.

I opened the envelope containing Winkler's yellow powder. How much of this stuff was sufficient to kill a human being? I didn't know. I solved the problem by pouring the entire contents into a bottle of Scotch.

Smith arrived at eight-thirty. He was a somewhat bulky man with long arms and his hair line initiated approximately one inch from his eyebrows. He was expensively, if not tastefully, dressed.

I closed the door of the study behind us. "The proof, please."

He revealed marigold yellow teeth and removed a revolver from his pocket. "This is just so that you don't get any funny ideas." Then he put the gun back into his

pocket and handed me an envelope.

I examined the contents. The papers were originals, not photostats, and apparently authentic. I wandered over to the liquor cabinet as I studied a hospital birth record. I made myself a bourbon and soda and then looked up as though I'd suddenly remembered he was still there. "A drink?"

"What you got?"

"Scotch?"

"That's it."

I poured a generous glass and handed it to him. He drained the entire contents and smacked his lips. "Good stuff."

That confirmed a suspicion of mine. People who drink Scotch have no sense of taste.

He extended the glass. "How about making that wet again?"

"Gladly." His simian aspect reminded me of good old Gillie Stearns and I asked a question. "Can you wiggle your ears?"

He seemed a bit saddened. "Used to be able to. But ever since my appendix got took out I lost the touch."

When I noticed that his coloring seemed to verge toward purple, I hastily put the papers back into the envelope and returned them. "These seem to be in order. And now if you'll excuse me, I'll get you the cash. I have it in the

library safe." His color grew worse.

I went to the library and sat down. I finished a pipe and then returned to the study.

Smith lay on the floor, quite dead, and it appeared that his departure had not been a pleasant one.

I withdrew the envelope from his pocket and then slung him over my shoulder. I carried him through the French doors to the automobile he'd parked in the circular driveway.

I drove toward the outskirts of the city, following a bus line. When the area seemed relatively unpopulated, I turned off and parked the car.

I walked back a half a dozen blocks before I boarded a bus.

Perhaps Smith's picture would appear in the newspapers when his body was found. If it did, and Henrietta noticed it, I would explain that a man like Smith undoubtedly had many enemies and that one of them had killed him. I felt confident that she would accept that explanation.

At Fremont Street, I left the bus and walked the two blocks to Ralph Winkler's home.

He opened the door and regarded me with distinct inhospitality. "Yes?"

"Ralph," I said. "We've been having a little trouble with field

mice in our apple orchard."

His economic smile indicated vindication. "So organic gardeners have field mice problems?"

"I'm afraid so. I wonder whether you might have something potent . . . some chemical . . . which might enable us to get rid of them?"

I was welcome instantly. He stepped aside and we journeyed through the house and to his garage.

He surveyed his pharmacy. "What'll you have? I've got compounds here that will throw mice into convulsions."

I recalled the messy decline of Smith. "Basically I'm a humanitarian. Do you have something gentle, yet still lethal?"

He was disappointed in me. "Very well. I suppose I have something like that here . . . somewhere. But you really should try Cyclolodidan. I use it all the time."

"Do you have field mice?"

He nodded glumly. "Can't seem to get rid of them."

When Henrietta returned at eleven that night, I told her that Smith would never bother her or Professor Henrich again. "Threatened him with the police and twenty years in prison. He left here shaken, trembling, and penitent."

Henrietta gazed at me admiringly. "You seem to be able to get things done, William. I feel so safe with you."

During the week, Henrietta usually lunches at the university, but at twelve-thirty the next day she came home breathless and smiling like a child. She waved an envelope. "It's been accepted."

"What has?"

"*Alsophilia grahamicus*."

"*Alsophilia grahamicus*?"

"A tropical tree fern, William. I discovered it during our honeymoon and when I couldn't classify it, I realized that it might be a true species. So I named it after you—that's the *grahamicus* part—and sent it to the Society for verification."

I rolled the words on my tongue. "*Alsophilia grahamicus*." Rather pleasing. Perhaps I might yet become a footnote in some textbook—my bid toward immortality.

"Are you pleased, William?"

"That was very thoughtful of you."

"I'm having the tip of one frond put into a plastic token so that you can wear it always."

That evening Adam McPherson appeared for dinner. It had been his habit to do so the first Tuesday of every month for the past ten years and after our marriage

Henrietta had still chosen to honor the standing invitation.

I met him at the door. "McPherson, I want a word with you."

He regarded me for a moment. "Really? What a coincidence. It was my intention to speak to you too." He glanced about. "Where is Henrietta?"

"Upstairs grading some term papers."

I led him into the study and came directly to the point. "McPherson, you are Henrietta's lawyer and comptroller. Surely you must have been aware that prior to my appearance this household was run in a most strange manner—padded payrolls, superfluous servants, astronomical household expenses."

He nodded. "Of course."

My eyes narrowed. "And yet you did nothing about it?"

"Why should I? After all, I am the one who was responsible for the entire glorious arrangement."

"You baldly *admit* that?"

"Certainly." McPherson went to the liquor cabinet and surveyed the contents. "It was quite a profitable arrangement for me. Kickbacks, you know." He looked back at me. "Henrietta is an excellent botanist, but she has no accounting ability whatsoever. And she trusted me."

I felt the impulse to strangle. "I

do not care how messy this is going to be, I intend to prosecute."

He was not perturbed. "If you do, I shall see that you join me in prison—or possibly worse. For murder."

I was, of course, temporarily quieted.

He brought forth a bottle and a glass. "Several years ago I noticed that Henrietta regularly withdrew five hundred dollars from one of her bank accounts. It was a relatively insignificant sum, but she seldom uses cash, and I became curious. I asked her about it and when she proved uncharacteristically evasive, I questioned the servants—who were under my command, so to speak—and eventually ascertained the existence of Mr. Smith. Further investigation on my part—if one may use that term for eavesdropping, established the reason for his monthly visits."

McPherson poured liquor into his glass. "Smith had a limited imagination. He was apparently satisfied with five hundred dollars. But I was not." He smiled. "Therefore I approached him with the proposal of prison or cooperation. Naturally he chose cooperation. Of the two thousand he eventually received monthly from Henrietta, one went to me."

I stared at the bottle he still held in his hand. It was the

Scotch which had eliminated Smith. I had forgotten to dispose of it.

McPherson put the bottle back on the shelf. "When Smith informed me that *you* wanted to see him personally, I wondered what you were up to now—after all you had already ruined one of my sources of income. And so I drove here last night, parked on the street, and waited for him to come out of your house. It was my intention to question him immediately about his meeting with you." He smiled. "His car came out of the driveway, but *you* were driving." He looked at his glass and then at me. "Can I make you a drink?"

"No, thank you," I said. "But by all means, please help yourself."

He savored and then finished the contents of his glass. He coughed appreciatively and reached for the bottle again. "I followed you. And when you walked away from Smith's car, I looked inside. Smith lay on the floor, obviously dead. I did not pry into the manner of his death and left immediately. How did you kill him?"

"I stabbed him in the back," I said.

He smiled. "Please do not attempt the same with me. I am wary and will remain at arm's

length." He tried to stay alert.

And now *I* smiled. "I cannot expose you without being exposed myself? And so it is your intention to resume bilking Henrietta's estate? With my passive cooperation?"

He nodded. "Exactly."

I noticed that his complexion was changing to a more colorful hue. "We will discuss this further after dinner," I said pleasantly. "And now I shall see if Henrietta is ready."

I retired to the library, smoked a pipe, and returned to the study.

McPherson was dead.

I removed his car keys from his pocket and carried his body to his car outside. I deposited him in the trunk compartment and parked the car on the street.

I returned to the house just as Henrietta came down the stairs. "Is Adam here yet?"

"No, my dear."

She smiled. "He's rather fond of me. It was very thoughtful of him to cry at our wedding."

We delayed dinner half an hour and then sat down without him.

At ten that evening when I went out for a walk, I disposed of McPherson's car in the same manner I had used for Smith and returned by bus.

Henrietta was considerably shocked when she read of Mc-

Pherson's death and the police were puzzled. Henrietta recovered, but the police remained puzzled and the days passed.

At the end of the semester, Henrietta and I packed and drove north to the Minnesota lake country. We rented a canoe, purchased supplies, and bravely proceeded into the wilderness on a warm Saturday afternoon.

Since we proceeded down stream, the paddling was not particularly tedious and the first hour passed pleasantly.

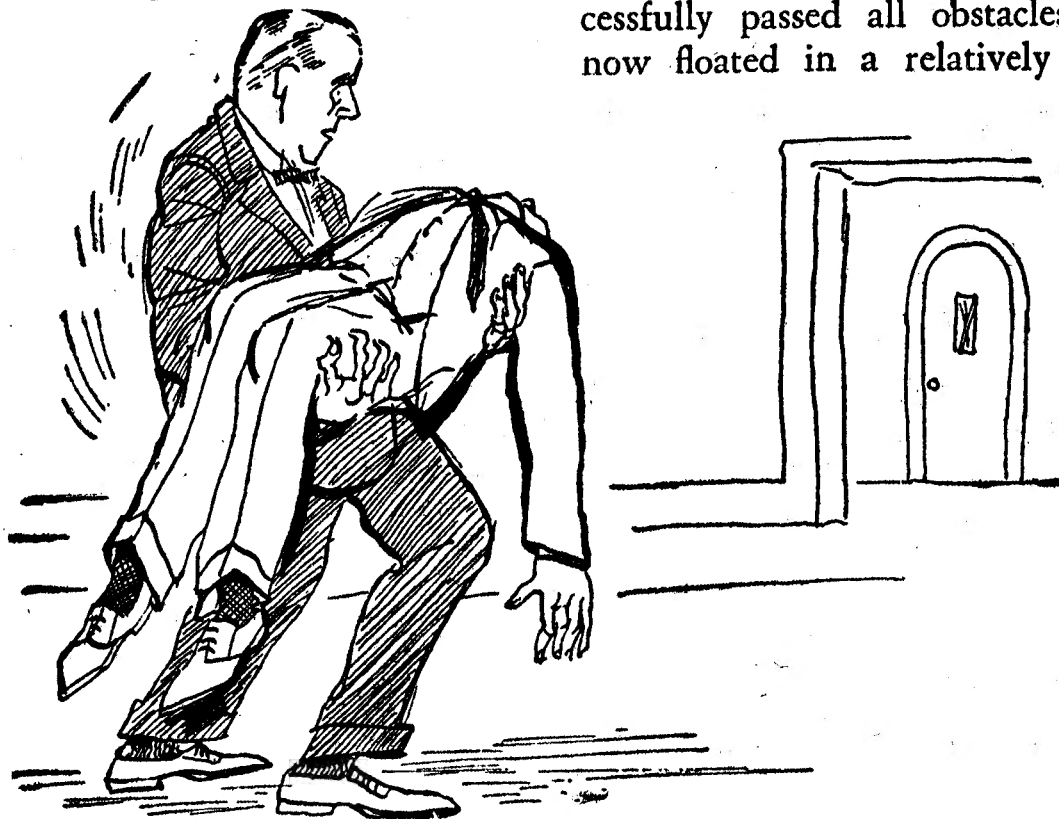
However as we approached the first white water, I realized, a bit too late, that the occupation of running rapids is a bit specialized.

I would gladly have paddled to

shore and portaged, but I found that we were in the grip of the current. We had no choice but to hold on and attempt to steer.

We safely rode two-thirds of the rapids and I had reached a faint optimism, when suddenly a jagged rock appeared directly ahead. I endeavored frantically to avoid it. However, the after end of the canoe smashed into the obstruction and we turned over.

I found myself tumbling in the rushing water, grasping wildly for some handhold, but my fingers merely slipped off the wet rocks. Suddenly I found myself falling. I plunged deep into the water. When I fought my way to the surface, I discovered that I had successfully passed all obstacles and now floated in a relatively quiet



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pool at their base. Then I relaxed.

I swam to shore, climbed the bank, and looked back upstream.

Henrietta clung to an outcropping of rock just before the drop into the pool. She was pale and her eyes looked toward me for help.

I shouted. "Henrietta, let go of that rock. You'll be carried into the pool below. It's perfectly safe."

She looked down and then at me. "But I can't swim."

I blinked. *She couldn't swim?*

I felt my heart beating. This was the opportunity! There would be no need for poison. There had been a canoe accident and she had drowned. It was as simple as that. And I would walk back to the nearest habitation and tell the story.

I raised my voice again. "Hold your breath and let go of that rock. I'll be waiting down below and I'll bring you to shore."

I took off my soaking shoes, my trousers, and my shirt. Then I smiled at her and waved my hand. "All right. Let go."

She did not hesitate.

The current caught her and she plunged over and down into the pool.

I turned my back toward the water. All I would have to do now was wait. How long? Five minutes? Ten?

I looked down at my clothes. The round plastic token containing the tip of frond had fallen out of my pocket and lay on the grass. *Alsophilia grahamicus*.

I found myself trembling.

I had killed Smith and McPherson and they had deserved to die. But does one kill a child?

A child? Yes, a child-woman and she loved me. And in my own way I had grown rather . . .

I cursed savagely and plunged into the water.

I found Henrietta immediately and brought her to the surface. She was still obeying my injunction to hold her breath, though rather desperately.

I grasped her and began backstroking towards the shore. "You may breathe now, Henrietta. But only through your mouth. Not your nose. Taste the air and if it has water in it, spit it out and try again."

When we reached shore we sat in the sun. But it was still a bit cool and so I held her.

She looked up at me. "I'll always be able to depend on you, won't I, William? All the rest of my life?"

I almost sighed. "I'm afraid so."

And in September I would probably be teaching at the university.

Suddenly I looked forward to it.